

Subject: Critical Habitat Designation for Southern Resident Killer Whales

From: parons <parons@rockisland.com>

Date: Mon, 14 Aug 2006 15:42:09 -0700

To: orcahabitat.nwr@noaa.gov

This transmits my comments on the Critical Habitat for Southern Resident Killer Whales.
Sharon Grace
San Juan Island







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SHARON GRACE
175 Gretchen Way
Friday Harbor, WA 98250
360-378-3377

August 13, 2006

Chief, NMFS,- Protected Resources Division
1201 NE Lloyd Blvd., Suite 100
Portland OR 97322-1274

Re: Comments to Proposed Critical Habitat for Southern Resident Killer
Whales

Dear Sirs/Mesdames:

I write to urge you to designate the entire Salish Sea area as critical habitat for the Southern Resident Killer Whales, without excepting the shallow areas with less than 20 feet of water.

In the Proposed Rules NMFS/NOAA recognizes that “[k]iller whales frequent a variety of marine habitats that do not appear to be constrained by water depth,” *citing* Baird 2000. *Endangered and Threatened Species; Designation of Critical Habitat for the Southern Resident Killer Whale, Killer Whale Natural History, Fed. Reg.* Vol. 71, No. 115, June 15, 2006, Proposed Rules. NMFS/NOAA also recognizes that transient killer whales and Northern Resident Killer Whales use shallow water. *Ibid.* Yet, NMFS/NOAA concludes that the Southern Residents do not use shallow water because their size “may limit maneuverability in shallow waters.” *Ibid.* This statement defies logic, since the Northern Residents and transients are for all relevant purposes the same size. While NMFS/NOAA states that there is “limited information” about the Southern Residents use of shallow water, there are many people on San Juan Island who have seen the Southern Residents close to shore in many of the rocky areas along the west side. I have seen some of the sub-pods regularly appear to work cooperatively to herd salmon against the rocks when foraging. I am attaching several photos that I have taken of Southern Residents close in to shore at the Land Bank West Side Preserve and at Lime Kiln State Park. I have many more photos, available at your request. As the following excerpt from an OrcaNetwork sighting shows, apparently the orcas use shallow water for migration:

From OrcaNetwork Sighting Report 7/26/06

July 22

In response to the individual who reported whales in Tumbo Channel on July 22 about 4:30 PM, it was J Pod that they were observing. I have personally

never seen J Pod in Tumbo Channel before, although they may cruise through more often than we realize. As the pod approached Tumbo Island westbound, a few individuals crossed the ridge in as little as 10 feet of water and entered Tumbo Channel, with more than 1/2 the pod still on the Strait of Georgia side. It wasn't long before the rest of the pod found their way around to the channel as well, and they began making their way slowly south. As was reported, the pod was in fine form, with lots of spyhops, tail slaps, some breaches and cartwheels. All behaviors seemed to be happening in slow mode, as the whales were travelling at such a leisurely pace and often just a few feet below the surface, even in deeper areas. A nice treat for the folks who live on the East side of Saturna Island and rarely see the Orcas so close to their homes.

Joan Lopez

Vancouver Whale Watch

As further evidence of the Southern Residents use of shallow waters, last week J pod came through Speiden Channel and then cut through the shallow channel between Battleship Island and Henry Island. Soundwatch has the data on this passage. In addition, the near shore areas are critical to the orcas food chain.

Since the Southern Residents use the shallow areas to travel and forage, and since the shallow areas are important to sustaining the food chain for the orcas, the shallow areas should be designated as critical habitat.

Sincerely,

Sharon Grace